The Philippine Department of Tourism
Official Newsletter
December 2023
Vol. 6, Issue No. 12

on the DOT

Frasco proudly presents WTA awards to PBBM

(Story on page 9)

P 2

DOT inaugurates first Tourist Rest Area in Bohol Island

P 10

DOT breaches industry targets for 2023; Frasco bullish on country's continued tourism transformation under Marcos administration in 2024

P 14

A celebration of service and Love for the Philippines:DOT recognizes employee excellence in 2023 PRAISE Awards

DOT inaugurates first Tourist Rest Area in Bohol Island

Panglao Island, Bohol - The Department of Tourism (DOT) led by Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco formally inaugurated and turned over the first completed Tourist Rest Area (TRA) in the Province of Bohol on December 2.

The first-ever TRA in Bohol will cater to tourists passing through the town of Dauis, which serves as a gateway to multiple tourist destinations in the province such as the famed Alona Beach in Panglao, Virgin Island Sandbar, Balicasag Island, and the historic Baclayon Church.

Dauis, which is one out of the two municipalities comprising Panglao Island, is also home to numerous tourism offerings including the Hinagdanan Cave, Our Lady of the Assumption Church, Bikini Beach, Bingag Beach, and San Isidro Beach.

"Here in Bohol, we view this gem of an island to be a source of national pride because you have, by your work, and by your example, established a sustainable eco-tourism destination where the public and private sector work hand in hand. And as a result of this initiative, you are now globally renowned as the Philippines' very first UNESCO Global Geopark," Secretary Frasco said before local government officials and tourism stakeholders in attendance at the TRA inauguration.

"I congratulate all of you, all of our officials, including our governor for this monumental achievement," the tourism chief added.

Local officials applaud DOT initiatives under Frasco

During the inauguration ceremony, Bohol First District Congressman Edgardo Chatto lauded the leadership of Secretary Frasco, noting that the tourism chief has *"always been a source of inspiration."*

"She creates more life for our tourism industry," Congressman Chatto said.

"Let me congratulate Secretary Frasco for launching this project. Maybe it's small for some, but it is big in terms of impact to the entire tourism industry," he added.

The lawmaker said that the construction of the TRA in

Bohol speaks well about the Boholano hospitality and the country's readiness to accept partnerships with the international community by bringing more tourists. The new tourist facility, according to him, will bring, in a way, convenience and comfort among travelers.

"Once you have these Tourist Rest Areas in many areas of the country, I am pretty sure that domestic as well as international travelers will really be amazed at the readiness of the country," he said.

Congressman Chatto is one of the principal authors of the Republic Act 9593 or the Tourism Act of 2009, which recognizes tourism as an indispensable component of the national economy and an industry of national interest and importance.

Meanwhile, Bohol Provincial Governor Erico Aristotle Aumentado said that the turnover of the first completed TRA in the province is a welcome development for the province as it enters "a new and exciting chapter" post-pandemic.

"Bohol's tourism industry is now entering a new and exciting chapter. As we continue to recover from the effects of the pandemic, we are entering a phase in which we must diversify our offerings for our guests and introduce our island paradise as more than just the white sand beaches of Panglao to the rolling slopes of Chocolate Hills," Governor Aumentado said in a message read by Provincial Administrator Aster Caberte, who represented him during the event.

The governor also expressed its gratitude to the DOT under the leadership of Secretary Frasco as well as to the Department's infrastructure arm, the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), the funding source of the project.

"The Provincial Government of Bohol, expresses its deepest gratitude to the Department of Tourism, especially headed by Secretary Christina Frasco, and the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority for this project. We aim to elevate Bohol's edge as a prime tourist destination through various investments, both public and private," he said.

For his part, Dauis Mayor Roman Bullen said that the turnover ceremony is a significant milestone for the municipality of Dauis as well as for the entire Bohol province.

"I could say that the Department of Tourism and TIEZA have chosen the best strategic location for the tourist area since our municipality is located in the sweet spot, which is the middle of Tagbilaran City and municipality of Panglao," he said.

On the sidelines of the inauguration, Secretary Frasco also led the distribution of kits tour guiding essentials to some Bohol-based tour guides.

More investors pick Bohol

The inauguration of the first TRA in Bohol also coincided with the groundbreaking ceremony of the soon-to-rise global luxury property JW Marriott Panglao Island Resort and Residences at the scenic Panglao Island, with Secretary Frasco likewise joining the local government heads of Bohol and some private stakeholders as the guest of honor at the momentous occasion.

"On behalf of the Department of Tourism, I congratulate the beautiful island province of Bohol, JW Marriott, and Apple One for this milestone in our tourism portfolio in the gem that is the island province of Bohol. The breaking ground of JW Marriott in Bohol signals global confidence in the Philippines' continuing resurgence and emergence in the global tourism market," the tourism chief said in her address.

The Secretary stressed that the vision of the Marcos Administration is not just for the country to recover after the devastating effects of the pandemic but to transform and elevate the quality of tourism offerings for the Philippines as well as to push for investments to come to the country.

"With JW Marriott establishing its Resort and Residences here, this spells more economic opportunities for our fellow Filipinos, increased livelihood, and the continuing contribution of tourism to our overall economic growth," she added.

"These investments in the Philippines will also signal to the rest of the world that the country is ready to take its place as Asia's next tourism powerhouse," the Secretary continued.

She also assured local stakeholders that the current administration will continue to strengthen the foundation for tourism by investing in infrastructure, connectivity, digitalization, and introducing innovation to the country's overall tourism portfolio.

"We join the people of Bohol in celebration of this milestone for the island, and we continue to express our confidence in Bohol's potential as a continuing pillar for sustainable ecotourism," she concluded. ***DOT***

DOT lauds PPP framework for Tourist Rest Area in Carmen, Cebu

The Department of Tourism (DOT) cites the newly inaugurated Tourist Rest Area in Carmen, Cebu as an *"ideal"* public-private partnership framework, noting that the collaboration among the DOT, the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), the local government unit of Carmen, and the Cebu Safari and Adventure Park is a first step toward building more important tourist facilities by way of working together.

In her message during the inauguration ceremony, Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco noted the *"unique"* arrangement of the said TRA which she added can be a benchmark for the other TRAs that are being built across the country.

"We are grateful because this TRA here in Carmen is unique in that a few days ago, the Municipality of Carmen approved a MOA with the Cebu Safari, represented here by COO Eduard Loop. Cebu Safari will operate the TRA in partnership with the LGU, and this public-private partnership shall serve as a benchmark for other TRAs in the country as truly it is only by way of our collaboration and convergence can we continue to progress all over the country," enthused the tourism chief.

Under the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) entered into by the parties concerned, the LGU of Carmen and the Cebu Safari and Adventure Park will jointly oversee the operations of the TRA with the latter taking a more active role in the hiring of required personnel for the operation, management, maintenance, conservation, and security of the TRA as well as supplying the utilities such as water, electricity, and telecommunications requirements for the facility.

In his message, Carmen Mayor Mariano T. Villamor said that the TRA will enhance the visitor experience for the more than 14,000 guests who visit their town every month. Located some 40 kilometers from Cebu City, the municipality of Carmen is home to the famous *"Carmen empanada"* and *"Carmen lechon"*. It also boasts an array of eco-tourism sites and natural wonders such as cold springs, caves, and waterfalls.

"I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco for this TRA and your unwavering support and dedication to the development of tourism not just in our region but in the entire country. Without your vision and your tireless efforts, these Tourist Rest Areas would not have become a reality. The Tourist Rest Area is not just a physical space or building; it represents our collective dedication to making Cebu the premier tourist destination in the entire country," said Mayor Villamor.

Located in Carmen, the Cebu Safari & Adventure Park is the premier Safari park in the country.

According to its website, *"It serves as a sanctuary for hundreds of different species of plants and animals. This over 170-hectare property features more than a thousand animals*

from 120 different species, aiming to provide world-class fun, learning, and entertainment to all its guests and be a sanctuary for flora and fauna and a retreat for guests to commune and harmonize with the environment."

"We express our sincerest gratitude to the DOT for this much-needed initiative. The facility is a comfortable place that will help tourists get the information they need and also guide them on attractions and activities not only in Carmen but in the 5th District (of Cebu). It is also a one-stop-shop that will showcase the different delicacies the district has to offer which will help promote local businesses," added Eduard Loop, the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the park.

Cebu Province to build Tourist Rest Areas in Cebu towns, sister cities

Meanwhile, Secretary Frasco thanked the Cebu Provincial government for its commitment to build at least six TRAs in Cebu Province, and its sister cities.

During the inauguration of the TRA in the Municipality of Carmen, Cebu Governor Gwendolyn Garcia announced that construction is underway for the TRAs that will be built in the towns of Santander, Pinamungahan, Dumanjug, and Bogo City, and one each for its sister cities of Albay and in Zamboanga Sibugay. The provincial government will shoulder the costs of construction.

"This is a much-needed infrastructure and only a woman with an eye for detail and passion for those that are her responsibilities would understand that these TRAs were precisely what we needed to promote tourism. Maraming salamat because we really, really need this and only Secretary Christina could have thought of this. Congratulations, Secretary Christina, such a job well done," said the governor.

The TRAs are established to improve the overall tourism experience by providing tourists basic services and amenities such as an information center, clean restrooms, a lounge and charging stations, a dining area, and pasalubong centers, to make their travel more pleasant, experiential, and worthwhile. It also serves as a venue to highlight Filipino artistry through the display of local products and the adoption of local materials and elements in its building design.

"We are hopeful that with the example set by the province of Cebu in supporting the Tourist Rest Areas of the DOT and the Marcos administration, this can be replicated all over the country," added the tourism chief.

Earlier, Secretary Frasco announced that the DOT, in collaboration with the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), the agency's infrastructure arm, plans to build 18 more TRAs in strategic locations across the country.

"So popular has been the reception of these Tourist Rest Areas and so well-received by our tourism industry stakeholders, that LGUs themselves are requesting for it. In addition to the 10 that we have already constructed, we are adding 18 more Tourist Rest Areas all the way from Batanes to Tawi-Tawi next year," confirmed the tourism Chief.

Secretary Frasco also expressed her gratitude to her home Province of Cebu for its overwhelming support as all cities and municipalities have adopted the Love the Philippines tourism branding campaign of the DOT saying, *"I thank you for your love and support. To me personally, this has given me courage, strength, and the continued will and determination to ensure that we take the benefits of tourism as far and wide as possible so we can continue to announce to the world all the reasons to Love the Philippines,"* Secretary Frasco added. ***DOT***

A Tourist Rest Area for Cebu's premier diving destination, Moalboal

Cebu's premier diving destination, Moalboal, gets a tourism boost as the Department of Tourism (DOT) and the TIEZA - Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority inaugurate a Tourist Rest Area in its municipality on December 20.

Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco led the unveiling ceremony together with Cebu Governor Gwen Garcia, Moalboal Mayor Inocentes G. Cabaron, and Cebu 7th District John Peter Calderon.

Strategically built along the national highway in Barangay Tunga, the Tourist Rest Area is expected to cater to visitors of Moalboal, frequented for its majestic sardine run at Panagsama Beach.

Moaboal also boasts of eco-tourism sites including Batadbatad Falls, Budlot Spring, the Magpayong Rocks Formation, Busay Cave, and dive spots—Tongo Point, Tuble Marine Sanctuary, and Talisay Wall.

Also present during the ceremony were DOT Undersecretaries Mae Elaine T. Bathan, Ferdinand Jumapao, Myra Paz Valderrosa-Abubakar, and central office Directors Atty. Annavie Lapitan, Judilyn Quiachon, and Ronald Conopio. ***DOT***

Tourism chief invites MUPH Michelle Marquez Dee to be the country's newest tourism ambassador

Manila, Philippines - After the much talked about 72nd Miss Universe Pageant, Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco personally extended an invitation to Filipina beauty queen and actress Michelle Marquez Dee to join the Department's promotional activities for tourism to further position the Philippines as a desirable country of destination among travelers.

This, as Dee paid a courtesy visit to the tourism chief at the DOT Central Office in Makati City, on December 1.

The tourism chief shared the DOT's openness to work with the beauty queen to further promote the country's multidimensional tourism gems.

Dee, who finished in the Top 10 for the 72nd Miss Universe Competition in El Salvador, also won the Best in National Costume award where she used the country's tourism tagline "Love The Philippines".

"Thank you for the honor that you have bestowed upon all Filipinos by carrying the flag of the Philippines so excellently and by declaring to the world your love for the Philippines and reminding the world of the many reasons to love the Philippines," the Secretary said.

"On behalf of the Department of Tourism, I would like to extend my gratitude for your support for Philippine tourism as well as for carrying Love the Philippines, and I extend to you my invitation for you to continue to be an ambassador of tourism for our country," she added.

Secretary Frasco also invited the Filipina beauty queen to join the Philippine Experience Program (PEP), the DOT's new promotional project that highlights the country's rich heritage, arts, and culture through a series of regional caravans.

"It's not new because you have already acted as our tourism ambassador through your representation of the country in Miss Universe. So, we certainly hope that there are more opportunities for us to collaborate, to push forward the aspirations of our President for tourism in the country," the Secretary continued.

"I'm so excited. I'm so humbled and honored. I didn't expect this kind of overwhelming flow of reception, love, and support," Dee replied.

In a separate interview with reporters, the beauty queen revealed that while she has traveled to a number of local tourist destinations, she wants to visit the Western Visayas and Mindanao regions.

"It's no secret that I've always been proud to call the Philippines my home and I really wanted it to shine on the Miss Universe stage because it is an amazing platform to showcase what you are passionate about," she said.

"I was able to showcase my advocacy, my creativity, and of course, hindi dapat mawala ang love ko for the tourism of the country. When we were chatting earlier, we will be touring around the Philippines. We will spread that goal and that passion to really make the universe know what tourism in the Philippines has to offer," she added. ***DOT***

Philippines cited for Global Tourism Resilience, wins World's Best Beach, Dive, City Awards

Dubai, United Arab Emirates - The Philippines is adding four major global recognitions to the long list of tourism awards received by the country this year as it bagged four major accolades at the prestigious World Travel Awards 2023 held at the iconic Burj Al Arab in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on December 1, Dubai time.

For the first time, the Philippines has been given the Global Tourism Resilience Award for demonstrating "global leadership, pioneering vision, and innovation to overcome critical challenges and adversity." *As one of only 5 countries and destinations in the world cited for this inaugural award, the Philippines and other "inaugural winners will serve as benchmarks for best practices in tourism resilience,"* according to the World Travel Awards.

The Philippines is also once again awarded the World's Leading Dive Destination and World's Leading Beach Destination, defending its 2022 titles. For the first time, the Philippines won the World's Leading City Destination for its capital, Manila.

Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco has expressed immense joy in the country's victories at the World Travel Awards, stating: *"We are elated and grateful that Philippine tourism continues to soar to global prominence with tourists declaring their love for the Philippines as the undisputed World's Leading Beach Destination and World's Leading Dive Destination, and now World's Leading City Destination, Manila. Receiving the Global Tourism Resilience Award is also especially meaningful as this is an affirmation of all the hard work done in the past year to strengthen the pillars of tourism development through convergence and collaboration towards the tourism transformation envisioned by our President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. These accolades are as much a source of Filipino pride as they are a testament to the enormous contribution of tourism to the Philippine economy and global standing,"* said Secretary Frasco.

"With these remarkable triumphs, the Philippines reinforces its position as an unparalleled destination, inviting travelers to explore our captivating shores, vibrant underwater realms, and dynamic urban landscapes as they immerse in our culture and heritage, and create unforgettable memories with the distinct grace and hospitality of the Filipino people. We express our profound gratitude to all who have contributed to this success and we continue to dedicate our wholehearted support to all our tourism stakeholders," she added.

The award was received by DOT Undersecretary Shahlimar Hofer Tamano and Assistant Secretary Maria Rica Bueno who represented the tourism chief during the awarding ceremony overseas.

"The diversity, the opportunities with sustainability, the beautiful beach resorts, and now the diving [sic], amazing, the beaches, amazing. As I said, the main asset is the people, and that is something that a lot of countries in the world don't have. And it's the people of the Philippines that make your tourism assets the most amazing. The work ethic, the happiness, the smile, and the hospitality that the Philippines have are global icons," explained World Travel Awards President and Founder Graham Cooke, who shared how he personally loves the Philippines and the Filipinos.

Established in 1993, the 30th annual World Travel Awards aims to acknowledge excellence across all key sectors of the travel, tourism, and hospitality industries. ***DOT***

Photo Courtesy of the Office of the President

Frasco proudly presents WTA citations to PBBM

Manila, Philippines - Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco on December 19 proudly presented before President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. the recent global accolades earned by The Philippines at the prestigious World Travel Awards (WTA) 2023.

During her visit to Malacañang Palace for the regular Cabinet Meeting, Secretary Frasco brought in the trophies for this year's World Leading Dive Destination and World's Leading Beach Destination awards, as well as the recognitions earned by the country for the first time, namely: Manila as the World's Leading City Destination, and the Global Tourism Resilience Award for demonstrating *"global leadership, pioneering vision, and innovation to overcome critical challenges and adversity."*

Secretary Frasco underscored the DOT's appreciation of President Marcos Jr.'s support especially at the start of his administration, when no less than the President himself tacitly manifested the prioritization of the tourism industry.

"On behalf of the Department of Tourism, and the men and women who have toiled the difficult path of the recovery of the tourism industry, we proudly present these awards to the President as he continues to be our anchor towards the prosperity and successes of our industry. President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr.'s transformative leadership and clear direction for the industry is the very reason why we have surmounted the challenges and emerged stronger and more resilient, ready to take on the mission of becoming a tourism powerhouse in Asia even as tourism continues to be one of the strongest pillars of the Philippine economy," said Secretary Frasco.

"Inspired by the accolades that we have earned from many prestigious award-giving bodies, we assure you that millions of Filipinos can lean on the industry as a source of opportunities for livelihood and employment in the coming years," the tourism chief added.

The tourism chief also vowed that more value-added projects that will further the tourism gains from 2023 await the industry next year. ***DOT***

DOT breaches industry targets for 2023; Frasco bullish on country's continued tourism transformation under Marcos administration in 2024

The Department of Tourism (DOT) expressed bullishness on the continual transformation of Philippine tourism under the Marcos administration in the succeeding years, as it successfully breached its year-end targets and achieved milestones for 2023.

"In the face of unprecedented challenges, Philippine tourism has shown remarkable resilience. Since the beginning of the Marcos administration, we saw the country as being one of the last in the ASEAN to open up to tourism once again post-pandemic. The work that demanded was innovation, adaptability, and the willingness to, as they say, get our hands dirty and do the work that had to be done to strengthen the pillars of Philippine tourism if only to give our country a fighting chance not only at recovery, but most importantly, at transformation. Under the visionary leadership of our President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr., the Philippines has begun to witness the fruits of the plans that have been put in place under his vision for transformation," Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco made the assertion on Tuesday (Dec. 12) during the Department's Presentation of Accomplishments at the Dusit Thani Manila.

Recovering PH tourism numbers

The tourism chief reported international visitor arrivals to the country not only surpassed the target but also breached the five-million mark before year-end.

"I am happy to report that as of December 12, we have breached the five-million mark in terms of international visitor arrivals contributing an impressive 439.50 billion pesos in receipts. With the holiday break fast approaching, we are confident we will further breach our earlier target of 4.8 million for 2023, underscoring our commitment to continuous growth for the industry and the economy," Secretary Frasco said.

As of December 11, the Philippines has received a total of 5,069,752 international visitor arrivals. Of this number, 4,658,123 or 91.88 percent are foreign tourists, while the remaining 411,629 or 8.12 percent are Overseas Filipinos.

South Korea ranks first as the Philippines' top source market with 1,341,029 arrivals, followed by the United States of America (USA) with 836,694; Japan with 285,655; China with 252,171; and Australia with 238,487. Meanwhile, Canada landed on the sixth place with 206,571, followed by Taiwan with 186,140, United Kingdom with 141,516, Singapore with 140,633, and Malaysia with 92,383.

According to the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, the average recovery rate of the Asia Pacific region is at 62 percent from January to September. The Philippines' recovery in terms of international tourist arrivals is bearing promising results as it has already reached 65.54 percent from January-September 2023.

In terms of visitor receipts, Secretary Frasco shared that the country is *"recovering faster than expected"* with PHP 458 billion visitor receipts from January to November this year, or already 95.85 percent of 2019 figures.

Meanwhile, tourism created 5.35 million jobs from 2.6 million visitor arrivals in 2022, or 11 for every 100 Filipinos.

"We are optimistic this number will increase this year, anticipating that we will have twice as much foreign visitors that we received last year. In pursuit of this growth direction, we are dedicated to creating a tourism landscape that is not only vibrant but also innovative. We have formulated policies that address government regulations that may not necessarily apply anymore especially with the post-pandemic landscape, and trying as best we can, in convergence with our fellow government agencies, to push for changes in regulation and the liberalization of visa policies coming into the Philippines, the ultimate goal of course, is to accomplish our President's vision of the Philippines becoming a tourism powerhouse," Secretary Frasco said.

Earlier this year, President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. had approved the National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) 2023-2028, which serves as the DOT's roadmap in the next few years, with connectivity, convenience, and equality as key strategies.

Putting a premium on quality tourism infrastructure

In keeping with the President's vision for an enhanced tourist experience in the country, the DOT, under the leadership of Secretary Frasco, has prioritized the pursuit of impactful and sustainable infrastructure projects.

Among these is the construction of the flagship Tourist Rest Areas (TRA) in strategic locations in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao to assist travelers as they make their way to the country's destinations. Envisioned as a one-stop-shop for tourists' needs, each TRA is equipped with clean restrooms, a lounge area, lactation room, pasalubong center for buying local crafts and products, and an information desk.

To date, the DOT and its infrastructure arm, the Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), have launched ten TRAs so far.

With connectivity as one of its key strategies, the DOT has also pursued a stronger collaboration with the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) in continuing existing projects, as well as identifying new projects under the Tourism Road Infrastructure Program or TRIP. This convergence allowed the construction of 158 kilometers of tourism roads.

In close partnership with the Department of Transportation (DOTr), the DOT has also embarked on the enhancement of the country's gateways and increasing air connectivity of the country.

Secretary Frasco happily shared that *"the Philippines has already recovered nearly 80 percent of its pre-COVID international incoming seat capacity. As of November 2023, there are over 1.4 million international seats available, vis-a-vis the one million recorded last year, and the 1.7 million recorded in 2019."*

Reintroducing the Philippines to the world

In welcoming the new era of Philippine tourism under the Marcos administration, the DOT unveiled the enhanced tourism campaign "Love the Philippines" which seeks to highlight to the world the country's many tourism assets that go beyond fun and adventure, including the country's natural assets, deep well of culture and history, gastronomy, among others.

In addition to an enhanced tourism campaign, the DOT through its centerpiece training program called the Filipino Brand of Service Excellence (FBSE) sought to enhance and uplift the quality of tourism services in the country anchored on the distinct Filipino brand of hospitality that is known all over the world, setting a target of training 100,000 workers by year-end, a target that the DOT successfully breached as early as October.

As of December 12, the number of FBSE-trained individuals has reached 124,116.

"Our effort to not just develop hard infrastructure but also soft infrastructure with focus on human capital development is part and parcel of the goal to capacitate our tourism workers in our bid to empower them and, in turn, increase tourism revenues across the entire tourism economy," Secretary Frasco said.

Aggressive diversification and equal promotion of tourism products

With (E)quality as its third key strategy, the DOT also led efforts to equalize tourism opportunities across the Philippines' regions, providing the cities, municipalities, and provinces with the necessary support that will help them develop or elevate tourism in their area, and extending proper attention to lesser-known tourism destinations.

The DOT launched the flagship program called the Philippine Experience Programs: Culture, Heritage, and Arts Caravan which emphasizes the country's diverse cultural heritage and rich artistic resources and equalizes tourism opportunities. The DOT so far launched the PEP in four regions: Davao, CALABARZON, Bicol, and Western Visayas regions.

In fully tapping into the domestic tourism market, which continues to be a strong driver of the country's tourism industry, the DOT also continues to organize major domestic expos such as the Philippine Travel Exchange (PHITEX), as well as regional fairs seeking to facilitate regional tourism exchange, including the second North Luzon Travel Expo (NLTE), Central Philippines Tourism Expo, and Mindanao Tourism Expos.

In a bid to further showcase Mindanao's readiness for tourism, the DOT has led several initiatives to build domestic and international visitors' confidence in the region and raise awareness of the stable security situation in the region.

The DOT has entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) and the Department of National

Defense (DND) to strengthen inter-agency partnership by ensuring that peace, security, and order are prioritized in tourism development programs.

Through its Tourist Oriented Police for Community Order and Protection (TOPCOP), the DOT continues to assure the safety and security of tourists training 7,910 officers on the program.

For the maiden edition of the PEP, the DOT brought members of the diplomatic corps and tourism stakeholders on a three-day immersive experience in the Davao region and just last month, it hosted the Bismillah: An Evening of Faith, Love, and the Flavors of Mindanao event to promote the region's richness in gastronomic offerings.

As it continues to deliver on its mandate on tourism promotions, the Department has also taken strides in diversifying the country's tourism product portfolio to go beyond the already established tourism products including sun and beach, nature-based, and dive tourism.

Towards this direction, the DOT launched several inaugural events including the Philippine Dive Tourism Dive Dialogue (PTDD), the Philippine Tourism Pride Summit, the Philippine Golf Tourism Summit, and the Philippine Creative Tourism Congress.

Working with the country's strength as an archipelagic nation and allure as a cruise destination, the DOT has also fortified its efforts to further develop cruise tourism in the country and cater to more market segments, leading several cruise welcome receptions and dialogues with stakeholders this year. Secretary Frasco shared that as of October, cruise calls to the Philippines have tallied 125.

Enhanced tourist convenience through innovation

In further enhancing the overall tourism experience and allowing the country to be at par with its ASEAN neighbors in terms of tourist convenience, the DOT has been active in pursuing digitalization projects and partnerships that will inure to the benefit of the tourism industry.

The DOT has partnered with the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) in pursuing the enhancement of internet connectivity in 94 tourism destinations.

The DOT has also taken an active role as far as visa reforms are concerned, initiating upon the directive of the President the high-level convergence meeting with other national government agencies such as the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), DICT, Department of Justice (DoJ), and the Bureau of Immigration (BI) to take up visa concerns and reforms to address remaining bottlenecks in the entry processes for travelers, particularly the issuance of electronic visas.

This year, the DOT also launched the Philippines' first centralized and multi-platform Tourist Assistance Call Center which shall serve as the hotline and one-stop shop for tourism- and travel-related information, coupled with the Travel Philippines App which reaped 31,071 downloads from September 25 for December 7 alone.

Marking another significant leap in Philippine tourism, the DOT launched the country's first-ever Hop-On Hop-Off Bus Tours (HOHO) in the cities of Makati and Manila that offers a convenient option for tourists to book their tours with digital tools including a dedicated website, a reloadable EMV-capable card, and a mobile app for booking tours, making cashless payments, GPS networked-bus arrival monitoring and video guides, as well as information on hotels, food, and tourism merchants.

Bringing the best of Philippine tourism to the world

The year 2023 also proved to be a historic one for The Philippines as it was elected Vice President for East Asia and the Pacific of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) General Assembly, a prestigious global position last held by the country more than two decades ago.

Represented by Secretary Frasco, The Philippines shared the stage with global tourism leaders and influencers from some 150 countries at the 25th UNWTO General Assembly at Samarkand Congress Center in Uzbekistan. In addition, the Philippines was also elected as Chair of the Commission for East Asia and the Pacific.

As chair, the country is set to host the Joint Commission Meeting of the Commission for East Asia and the Pacific, and the Commission for South Asia in Cebu next year.

In sustaining international interest in the Philippines as a top-of-mind destination, the DOT through its marketing and promotions arm, the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) Philippines, led the country's successful participation in the biggest key travel and tourism expos abroad, as well as lead domestic promotions events.

Just this year, the DOT, together with the TPB, has generated PHP 6.27 billion in total sales leads.

The concerted efforts of the DOT and stakeholders to elevate the standing of Philippine tourism has borne fruit, as demonstrated by the accolades that the country has reaped from prestigious travel and tourism authorities and publications for 2023 alone, among which are four major awards at the World Travel Awards (WTA) 2023 held recently in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

The successfully defended its 2022 titles as the World's Leading Dive Destination and World's Leading Beach Destination and, for the first time, bagging the World's Leading City Destination for Manila and the Global Tourism Resilience Award, being one of only five countries and destinations in the world to receive the inaugural 2023 WTA citation.

"Being awarded for tourism resilience is a reflection of the hard work that has been done by government, in partnership with the private sector, to ensure that the losses that have ensued as a result of the pandemic could be addressed, and at the same time that we elevate the status of Philippine tourism in the ASEAN and in the world," Secretary Frasco said.

Whole-of-nation approach to continue

According to the DOT chief, these milestones for Philippine tourism are the fruits of the concerted efforts of tourism stakeholders, as well as partners from the government and the private sector. She also shared that in addition to continuing its flagship programs, 2024 will see the establishment of additional 18 Tourist Rest Areas all over the country, as well as exploration of new cruise destinations, and new areas for the Philippines Hop On Hop Off Bus Tours.

Other new initiatives will include the construction of Tourist Emergency Centers (TECS), and the roll out of the Disaster Risk Reduction Management (DRRM) Operations Manual for Philippine tourism.

"Notwithstanding the fact that the Philippines barely contributes to climate-related disasters in terms of pollution in comparison with other nations, the sad thing is that our country is one of the most vulnerable to climate change. I saw this for myself when I was Mayor of Liloan in Cebu that had been ravaged by Super typhoon Odette that saw nearly thirty thousand of my constituents lose their homes, lose their livelihood, their fishing boats, and the like. And so, one of the efforts that we have made under the Department of Tourism under the President's administration is to have a proper framework for disaster response for our DOT Central Office, our regional offices, in partnership with our tourism destinations across the country," she explained.

Frasco also shared that the effort to attract more tourism investments will continue especially in the aspects of hotel and accommodations, marine transportation, as well as the development of Tourism Enterprise Zones.

7.7 million international arrivals eyed for 2024

Secretary Frasco shared the baseline target of 7.7 million international visitor arrivals next year.

"I understand that this is not yet our pre-pandemic numbers of 2019 at over 8.2 million international arrivals, but what I can assure you is that we will push as hard as we can and fully activate our convergences with other government agencies in order to breach this target and bring us closer to pre-pandemic numbers even as we grapple with many forces beyond our control, globally, and locally," Secretary Frasco said.

In a media opportunity, the DOT chief expressed her gratitude to all the domestic and foreign tourists who have shown love to the Philippines for 2023.

"The world has loved thE Philippines in 2023, and we are very grateful to our friends from all over the world who have affirmed na 'yung Pilipinas po ay nagpapatuloy bilang World's Leading Beach and Dive Destination, Asia's Best Cruise Destination, pati na rin po 'yung isa ang Pilipinas among five countries in the world awarded as a Global Tourism Resilience awardee, na nagpapakita na yung transformation na nais ng ating Presidente ay nangyayari na po, at 'yung turismo ay nagbibigay ng 5.35 million employment sa ating mga kababayan. Nagpapasalamat din po ako sa ating fellow Filipinos who have continued to support not just international tourism but also domestic tourism. We have pushed hard to continue to promote the country to the rest of the world, even as we also develop our emerging destinations all over the country," Secretary Frasco enthused. ***DOT***

A celebration of service and Love for the Philippines: DOT recognizes employee excellence in 2023 PRAISE Awards

In a heartfelt ceremony on December 04, officials and employees of the Department of Tourism (DOT) came together to celebrate the outstanding contributions and unwavering dedication of the Department's Loyalty and Retirement Service Awardees, as well as employees that qualify for the Career and Self-Development Incentive under the Program on Awards and Incentives for Service Excellence (PRAISE).

The PRAISE Loyalty Awards are granted to officials and employees who served the government continuously and satisfactorily for at least ten (10) years, while Retirement Awards are conferred to officials and employees who have retired, whether under optional or compulsory schemes. Career and Self-Development Incentive award, on the other hand, is conferred to employees who have continuously strived for excellence in improving themselves through completing a course or degree.

Leading the DOT 2023 PRAISE Awarding Ceremony is no less than Tourism Christina Garcia Frasco, who expressed her utmost gratitude and appreciation for all the awardees.

"It's only been a year and, throughout that, I have not seen anything less than dedication, love, commitment, courage from our employees of the Department of Tourism—from the central office, our various operating units, from the hierarchy to the rank and file, and also to our regional offices—one thing has been consistent in my experience working with people who work for the Department of Tourism; there is no doubt that you love the Philippines," Frasco said.

Despite the recent challenges that were faced by Philippine tourism in over a year and a half, Secretary Frasco commended and thanked the awardees and DOT employees for their resilience and sacrifices in pushing forth Philippine tourism.

"Tandaan ninyo po, 'yung trabaho po ninyo, kahit ano man ang ginagawa n'yo, anong opisina kayo, anong region kayo, whether central office or out on the field, each duty that you fulfill pursuant to our purpose that is to push for Philippine tourism, is felt far and wide by Filipinos and their families who enjoy the

benefits of a very robust and successful tourism industry under the Marcos administration. I've learned so much from you. And I feel that I feel really blessed to lead an organization where when you ask people to transcend, they will exceed. And when you ask people to perform, they will show up and they will deliver," the DOT chief said.

Loyalty and Retirement Awardees were given plaques of recognition, memorabilia, and cash incentives in accordance with existing Civil Service Commission (CSC) rules and regulations. Meanwhile, Career and Self-Development Incentive awardees also received Certificates of Excellence and cash incentive from the Department.

"What you can rest assured is that we will do everything that is within our power to make sure that you feel that you're loved, you're well taken care of, and you are deeply appreciated," Secretary Frasco said.

In addition to the prescribed incentives, Secretary Frasco announced that each awardee will receive additional gifts from her and husband, Deputy Speaker Duke Frasco's personal funds.

Joining Secretary Frasco in the DOT 2023 PRAISE Awarding Ceremony were DOT Undersecretary and Chief of Staff Mae Elaine Bathan, Undersecretary for Administration and Finance Shereen Gail Yu-Pamintuan, OIC-Undersecretary Verna Buensuceso, and Director for Administrative Service Jovencio Zaragoza. ***DOT***

DOT CELEBRATION OF LOVE

DOT mounts the 1st Philippine Creative Tourism Congress 2023

The Department of Tourism Office of Product and Market Development (DOT-OPMD) with support from the DOT Region VI office hosted the Philippine Creative Tourism Congress (PCTC) 2023, a transformative event aimed at shaping a new perspective of tourism in the Philippines.

Creative Tourism, hailed as the catalyst for a new era in travel, is an innovative approach that involves both tourists and local communities in crafting unique and immersive travel experiences - a concept centered on co-creation.

The Congress is slated from December 6 to December 8 at the Art District in Bacolod City. As a relatively new dynamic in the tourism milieu, the event aims to redefine the landscape of travel and tourism in the country.

Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, honored as the keynote speaker on December 6, expressed her enthusiasm about the congress saying, "Together, we approach a new frontier for tourism that delves deeper into the social fabric that makes up the Filipino identity. For years, the world has come to know the Philippines for the conventional fun and adventure that we have to offer. Now, it's time for the world to discover the heart and soul of our nation."

"As a result of exchanges and the work that will be done in this Congress, a first for the Philippines, we shall be able to provide meaningful and authentic experiences to our tourists to actively participate, co-create, and immerse with our local communities and stakeholders from our tourism and creative industries on over the Philippines, "the tourism chief added.

Envisioned as a convergence of tourism luminaries, creative industry professionals, policymakers, and stakeholders, the PCTC endeavors to unearth the untapped possibilities of creative tourism. It seeks to facilitate knowledge exchange, share best practices, and lay the groundwork for its sustainable advancement throughout the Philippines.

"This first Philippine Creative Tourism Congress aligns with President Ferdinand Bongbong Marcos Jr.'s vision for the tourism sector to play an invaluable role in the promotion of the Filipino brand that is deeply rooted in our rich cultural heritage. As the President himself has said, time and again, it is time to welcome the rest of the world with an enhanced Filipino brand that is unique, attractive, and creative," Secretary Frasco said.

The PCTC 2023 represents a cornerstone in the DOT's commitment to amplifying the cultural richness and creative prowess of the Philippines on the global stage. It marks the initiation of a journey toward sustainable and inclusive tourism, encapsulating the essence of collaboration and innovation.

Other institutions that supported the facilitation of the Congress include the City of Bacolod, the Negros Occidental Provincial Government, and the Slow Food Community of Negros.

The PCTC is a collaborative effort between the DOT and the Creative Tourism Network (CTN), a non-profit organization dedicated to showcasing destinations that leverage creative tourism as a distinct element to entice the new generation of travelers and bolster the destination's value chain.

In addition to plenary sessions aimed at providing general understanding of creative tourism and its various iterations, the Congress is interspersed with several simultaneous breakout sessions to facilitate more distinct appreciation of this specialized tourism variation spread in the 3-day event. The occasion is dedicatedly attended by more than a hundred participants from Members of the Philippine House of Representatives, the Philippine Creative Industries Development Council (PCIDC), Local Government Units, public and private sectors with interest in Creative Tourism, and the different DOT regional offices.

In her keynote address, Department of Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco lauded Christopher de Venecia, the principal author of the Philippine Creative Industries Development Law.

"As an ex officio member of the Philippine Creative Industries Development Council, the DOT is actively working to align creative tourism with this legislative framework. We are honored to have in our midst the principal author of the Philippine Creative Industries

Development Law, Congressman Christopher De Venecia. His passion and dedication for all things creative has been a driving force for our collaboration, culminating in this very first Philippine Creative Tourism Congress. Daghang salamat Congressman," Secretary Frasco remarked during her message as she stressed the relevance of the law that solidified the creative industries in the country.

The recently enacted Republic Act 11904, known as the Philippine Creative Industries Act of 2022 (PCIDA), stands as a beacon for fostering the creative industries. Mandating the safeguarding and fortification of the rights and capacities of creative firms, creators, and stakeholders in the country, this law also advocates for the establishment of the Philippine Creative Industries Development Council (PCIDC). As an ex-officio member of this council, the DOT assumes a critical role in steering the Philippine Creative Industries Development Plan, integrating creative tourism as a pivotal tourism product in alignment with the NTDP. ***DOT***

National Farm Tourism Summit 2023: Fostering growth and collaboration for sustainable tourism

DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM
PHILIPPINES
NATIONAL FARM TOURISM SUMMIT AND TRADE FAIR 2023
"CULTIVATING LOVE FOR THE PHILIPPINES: EMPOWERING FUTURE FARMERS THROUGH ENRICHED TOURISM EXPERIENCES"
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The Department of Tourism (DOT) Farm Tourism Program on December 6 hosted the National Farm Tourism Summit and Trade Fair at the Ayala Malls in Bacolod City.

Organized through the Department's Office of Tourism Regulation, Coordination & Resource Generation (TRCRG), the summit gathered farm tourism operators, stakeholders, policymakers, and partner agencies nationwide with the aim to foster meaningful dialogues and actionable resolutions to emergent issues impacting farm tourism, as well as provide an avenue for collective action towards the growth and development of the sector.

The summit likewise aimed to provide comprehensive updates on farm tourism programs, enhance awareness about its business potential, and engage in collaborative problem-solving for the industry's advancement.

Delivering her keynote address, Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, emphasizing the pivotal role of farm tourism in the country's sustainable growth, as she expressed the DOT's commitment to lead in further developing and supporting the sector.

"*Since the advent of the farm tourism development after 2016, we have witnessed the transformation of farm tourism into a dynamic industry, offering diverse products and services beyond traditional farming. The law recognizes the synergies between agriculture and tourism for growth and development. We, at the Department of Tourism, welcome the mandate to lead and administer farm tourism development in the country. The commitment of our President Ferdinand Bongbong Marcos Jr. to this market is evident,*" Secretary Frasco said.

As of December 2, 2023, the DOT has officially accredited 231 farm tourism sites across the Philippines, highlighting the sector's growth and potential.

The Summit underscores the mandates of the Tourism Act of 2009 and the Farm Tourism Development Act of 2016, which advocate for sustainable tourism, economic growth, and community development through the integration of agriculture and tourism.

Recognizing farm tourism as a priority niche market for domestic travelers, the DOT has continued to prioritize its development and promotion, in tandem with culinary tourism, through various initiatives and collaborations.

Building upon the success of the 2022 National Farm Tourism Summit and Trade Fair in Clark, Pampanga, this year's summit aimed to deepen awareness, spur business development, and elevate service standards within the farm tourism industry.

In addition to the discussions that encouraged cross-sectoral stakeholders to collectively address pertinent challenges, driving the industry towards a more robust and sustainable future, the summit also features a three-day trade fair which will run from December 6 until 8.

Addressing the summit delegates, Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco expressed the DOT's steadfast in its commitment to advancing farm tourism, as she acknowledged the collaborative efforts of all stakeholders which, she noted, is essential for nurturing the burgeoning sector and in propelling the Philippines further towards a vibrant and sustainable tourism landscape.

"Above and beyond the products and services that you're able to offer in your accredited farm tourism sites, I would dare say, however, that the best asset that your sites are able to offer is that distinct love of warmth and hospitality of the Filipino. And that in and of itself is an inherent advantage that we have as a nation," Secretary Frasco concluded. ***DOT***

DOT launches Bisita, Be My Guest Program in Dubai, UAE

Consistent with its effort to showcase the many reasons to love the Philippines, the Department of Tourism (DOT) launched the Bisita, Be My Guest (BBMG) Program in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on December 3 at the Asiana Hotel.

This marked the flagship program's sixth international launch, following other successful international launches in Tokyo, Japan, Berlin, Germany, Los Angeles and San Francisco, California, and London this year.

Representing Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, DOT Undersecretary Shahlimar Hofer Tamano led the program's launch, urging fellow Filipinos in Dubai to be tourism ambassadors of the country.

"On behalf of our Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco and the entire Department of Tourism family, we are delighted to share with you today our innovative incentive travel program, the Bisita Be My Guest or the BBMG, a program that is designed to reward you for inviting your foreign friends and colleagues, and family to visit the Philippines. This, along with the many good news on the advances we have made for the Philippine tourism under the leadership of our dynamic and indefatigable Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco," the Undersecretary said.

"BBMG aims to showcase the Philippines as a premier tourist destination and to inspire Filipinos to share the country's beauty with the world," he added.

Undersecretary Tamano also underscored the substantial Filipino population in Dubai, highlighting the potential of the United Arab Emirates as a partner for the growth of Philippine Tourism.

"Filipinos have a significant presence in the UAE, with around 700,000 Filipinos residing in Dubai alone. These numbers show the Filipino community's strength and the potential of the United Arab Emirates as a partner for the growth of Philippine Tourism," noted Undersecretary Tamano.

A collaborative effort between the DOT, the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), and the Tourism Promotions Board Philippines (TPB), the BBMG program is an innovative incentive program which aims to encourage Filipinos, particularly Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and Overseas Filipinos (OFs), to be tourism ambassadors and invite their friends and family to the Philippines with the chance to win grand raffle prizes.

Among the prizes up for grabs are a house and lot from AyalaLand, condominium units from Megaworld Corporation and SMDC, shopping sprees from Rustan's and SM Supermalls, and holiday packages to select destinations, inclusive of round-trip flights from Philippine Airlines and Cebu Pacific Air. ***DOT***

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